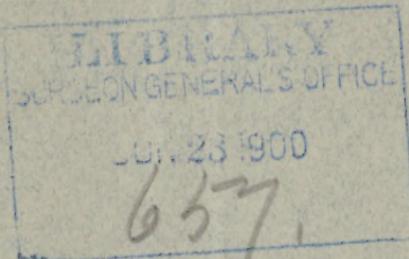


BOARD OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

In Memoriam

CHARLES A. ROBERTSON, A. M., M. D.



Albany, N.Y.

1880.

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BOARD OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

PROCEEDINGS AT A SPECIAL MEETING HELD APRIL 2, 1880,

TO TAKE ACTION IN RELATION

TO THE DEATH OF

CHARLES A. ROBERTSON, A. M., M. D.

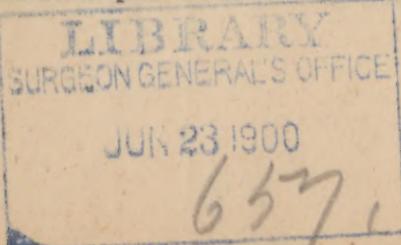
Present — Mr. President Easton, and Messrs. Draper, Flinn, Hoyt, Lipman, Lewi, McCall, Morgan, Morrill, and Templeton.

Absent — Mr. Lynch.

The President announced the object of this special meeting as follows :

GENTLEMEN — This Board is again called upon to mourn the loss of one of its most worthy and distinguished members. Dr. Charles A. Robertson is dead.

A few weeks ago, at his request, I had a personal interview with him in his sick room. It was on a pleasant, quiet Sabbath afternoon. He conversed freely on various topics of material interest, and spoke hopefully and cheerfully in regard to the prospects of his ultimate recovery, and looked forward with evident pleasure to the time, as spring advanced, when he would meet with us again before the expiration of his term in June. A matter



in which he seemed deeply interested, and on which he spoke freely and fully, was the study of industrial drawing in the public schools. He was deeply impressed both with its intrinsic value and its importance as a branch of study, and looked upon its introduction into the schools as the beginning of a new era in public education.

As chairman of the Committee on Music and Drawing we are greatly indebted to him for the success that has attended the prosecution of the latter study. He gave much time and thought to the subject, and assisted and encouraged the newly appointed teacher in his work. For what he did in this direction, for his devotion to this important work, he earned and deserves the praise of every friend of our public school system.

Dr. Robertson was a man of very marked character, was ambitious to excel in whatever he undertook. In his death, the medical profession and the cause of public education suffer an irreparable loss.

Gentlemen, I now ask the pleasure of the Board.

Mr. Draper moved that a committee of three be appointed to draft a suitable expression of the sentiments of the Board upon this occasion.

Carried.

The President named Messrs. Draper, Lewis and McCall as such committee.

A brief recess was then taken, when the committee returned and reported as follows :

To the Board of Public Instruction :

The committee appointed to draft a suitable expression of the sentiments of the Board in relation to the death of Dr. Charles A. Robertson recommend that the following entry be made upon the journal :

Called together in special session because of the announcement that Dr. Charles A. Robertson, one of our number, has passed from the scenes of earthly labor and usefulness over to the rest

eternal, we adopt the following as an expression of our feelings upon this melancholy occasion :

Charles A. Robertson was a man of high character, of liberal education, of free thought and of determined purpose. In him nature and culture had coöperated to produce an ideal gentleman. He was a man not only of convictions but of courage. He thought for himself, and he boldly and aggressively stood by his ideas. His earnest, unyielding positiveness oftentimes led him into heated conflicts of opinion, but he never forgot to be a gentleman. In all the relations of life he was true and sincere. To this Board he brought the brightest and the most varied accomplishments, and the highest devotion to the public interests. In his death Albany loses a most honored citizen, and our public school system mourns a true and valued friend.

We bow in sad submission to the omnipotent will which doeth all things well, and record our purpose to exalt and emulate his virtues and profit by his example.

Your committee recommend that the Faculty of the High School, and the Principals of the Grammar Schools, be invited to meet with the Board and attend the funeral in a body.

Respectfully submitted,

A. S. DRAPER,
JOSEPH LEWI,
JOHN A. McCALL, JR.

Mr. Templeton moved the adoption of the memorial and the recommendation of the committee.

Mr. McCall spoke as follows :

Mr. PRESIDENT—While not being favored as some of the members of the Board have been, who were honored with an association of two years or more with the lamented Dr. Robertson, yet I feel moved to express my regret at his death.

Among the members of that profession in which he had chosen to mark out for himself a reputation his ability was conceded, and

his laudable ambition of being foremost in the ranks of honorable men was gratified. A man of culture his tastes naturally led him to the desire of promoting the success of the public schools, and of providing such an education for our children as is essential to an honorable bearing in life, and will lead to the cultivation of that intelligence which eradicates ignorance and bigotry alike. As I understood him there was ever uppermost in his mind a desire to add to the contentment of his fellow men. In no illiberal spirit he differed at times with some of my brother members of the Board as to certain methods they desired to pursue, and although a majority dissented from some innovations he sought to establish, yet the ability and integrity he possessed called from those who were opposed to him the acknowledgment of an independence in thought and action, indicative of a firm belief in the views he expressed. It is fitting, therefore, that we, his fellow-members, should give utterance to our grief for the life gone out ; that we should place upon the records of our Board the language that properly expresses the deep loss that we have sustained.

You gentlemen of the Board who were his associates during that portion of his membership when he enjoyed his health and gave evidence of the abilities he brought to the discharge of his trust are more competent to eulogize his faithfulness than I am, still, I have learned from your records that he was a valuable and efficient member, being always ready to perform the duties assigned to him.

Deeply will his loss be felt among the poor of our city who, needing his advice and treatment, found in him the true, courteous, charitable physician.

In a few days the body of our departed friend is to be taken from this the city of his adoption to a resting place beneath the shadow of his "Alma Mater." May the lesson that his death teaches be instructive to all of us, for there is on the bright side of every life that which recalls the benefit of a well spent career, and which creates, by force of its example, good feeling among

the people, wise counsel in the administration of public affairs, and honesty of purpose in all things.

Well has it been written—

“ Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal;
‘Dust thou art, to dust returnest,’
Was not spoken of the soul.”

Mr. Morrill then said :

Mr. PRESIDENT—I feel it a duty as well as a privilege to bear testimony, not only to the successful manner in which Dr. Charles H. Robertson discharged his duties as a member of this Board, but also to his amiable character as a man, and his successful and honorable career as a physician. Although his long sickness necessitated his absence from this Board, yet we have always felt his presence with us. I had the pleasure of sitting with our deceased member for only a few meetings; but outside of this Board I have been intimately acquainted with him for a number of years. Some of my fellow members, who have acted with him in the affairs of this Board, can better testify as to his usefulness here. Dr. Robertson, as a man, was upright, just and honorable. He had received a complete education, and was thereby eminently fitted for a seat in this Board. As a physician, Dr. Robertson stood at the head of his profession; he was beloved and respected by all who came in contact with him. In his specialty as an oculist and aurist his reputation and fame were wide spread, and in his practice he was, not only to his friends but to himself, surprisingly successful, and many voices of those once afflicted will be heard in long years to come speaking praises to his memory. His numerous writings were noted for being brilliant in thought, concise in substance, and particularly instructive. Dr. Robertson was the first specialist of the eye and ear to locate in this city, and at first found that building up a practice of that character somewhat discouraging; but by perseverance and continued faithful attendance to his duties and studies, he was enabled to found one of the most lucrative practices in our

city. But we might continue telling of the many virtues of our departed co-laborer for an indefinite period, and still not do justice to his memory. In the death of Dr. Robertson we have lost a true and tried friend, this Board a faithful and honorable member, and the citizens of Albany a public benefactor.

Mr. Flinn made the following remarks :

Mr. PRESIDENT — A short time ago it was my privilege to have an interview with our departed colleague. It would have moved one to pity to see in his wan face and attenuated frame the evidences of long and severe suffering. You would, however, have rejoiced in his manhood ; indeed it was almost inspiring to witness the heroic resignation of the sufferer minutely detailing every particular connected with his illness, viewing and speaking of his pains and privations with such philosophical calmness, that they were deprived of much of their poignancy. So patient through it all, surely he deserves a crown for his manly endurance.

I need not endeavor to add to the proposed official expression. The resolutions, so neatly worded and so full of tender feeling, meet with my concurrence. All will admit that they do not over-estimate his intellectual abilities or his educational acquirements. He was indeed a distinguished worker in the field of knowledge. As a member of this Board, Commissioner Robertson was worthy of emulation. His earnestness and enthusiasm for the advancement of measures in which he was particularly interested was highly commendable.

His death, and those of our friends on every side, should serve to admonish us that this life should be but a preparation for death. Living with this in view, the dread messenger will not affright or surprise us.

Mr. Morgan then said :

Mr. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE BOARD — Upon this sad occasion I would embrace the opportunity to express my appreciation of Dr. Robertson. I had been acquainted with him

for several years, and had seen a considerable of him as commissioner, as a physician and as a private citizen. There were many things about him I always admired, especially his originality of thought and action. He never copied any one, but always had an opinion of his own, and his actions were the result of his convictions. He was fearless and independent, and one of the kind of men that help to move the world forward.

As a commissioner he was faithful and valuable, and especially on the department of Music and Drawing he has made an imprint that will ever be felt. Being chairman of the committee on that subject when Drawing was first introduced into our schools, his wisdom and patience have had a great influence in making that study successful and profitable.

In the department of medicine he exhibited the same traits of character, studious, persevering, courageous and successful, the good that he has done to suffering humanity, gratuitously and otherwise, will never and can never be known or appreciated, for he was not the man to make known his triumphs with a trumpet; but there are many people in Albany who owe it to Dr. Robertson that they see the light of day.

He was the agreeable and courteous citizen, kind and accommodating, always ready to do an office of friendship, and amid the varying scenes of life, it was always a pleasure to notice in this man the results of good training and early culture.

Among the Masonic fraternity he stood with the highest in the order, and earnestly carried out their principles and good practices.

We have all lost an associate whose memory will ever remain dear in our hearts.

Mr. Draper spoke as follows:

Mr. PRESIDENT—I was startled this morning at the announcement that an associate upon this Board had, in the preceding night, paid the great debt of nature, and gone over to the unknown and the eternal. The destroying angel has been in our midst and taken one of the brightest and best from our circle. To be sure,

the enemy gave long warning of his coming, but our friend had for so long a period combatted the monster with success that we had come to feel that, for the present at least, the man was the master, and that he would, in time, resume the position he had been accustomed to fill so well in social, professional and public life. But with all his will-power he was only a man, and, like all the rest of his kind, no match for the great enemy of his race. He has gone the way that the millions have trodden before him and that the millions will tread after him. The keen eye is lustreless, the quickened pulse is motionless. He is gone forever, and we stand powerless in the presence of the majesty of nature's universal and inevitable law. My estimate of the character of our friend is very generally expressed in the memorandum for entry upon the journal which has been submitted by the committee for your consideration. But there are one or two other observations, of a personal rather than a public nature, which I am glad to have the opportunity of making. My association with Dr. Robertson upon this Board was not of very long duration. It was but a few months after my accession to your number before his failing health rendered it impossible for him to discharge the duties of his position. The time was sufficiently long, however, for me to be thoroughly impressed with the many good qualities of his mind and heart. I have always felt under obligations to him for the kindness and cordiality which he uniformly manifested towards me, and I place my humble flower upon his casket to-night with a heavy feeling at my heart which only comes from a sense of personal loss.

Dr. Robertson was a positive man, and, like all positive men, he came into conflict with other positive men. He knew no such word as "policy" or "expediency." He thought out his course, and then pursued it, and no argument but one which appealed to his judgment could operate upon him to change it. Perhaps it is not going too far to say that our friend courted opposition and loved a contest. Nearly all positive men do. It is altogether likely that he made mistakes. That fact can in no wise lower our

estimate of a man exhibiting his character and qualities. He was a man of unquestioned integrity, and he was aggressive, and these far more than compensate for any mistakes which he may have made. It is far better to go ahead at the expense of making mistakes than not to go ahead at all. His frank, bold, sincere nature will a thousand times outweigh any unpleasantnesses which were the indirect and temporary products of these characteristics of the man. Even death itself has no right to ask that we shall be untrue in measuring the character of the departed; at the most it can only exact generosity. We are to estimate his character at what it was, not at what it should have been. The Egyptians were accustomed to hold an inquest not upon the body, but upon the character of the deceased. A public prosecutor called witnesses before an established tribunal, and investigated the reputation which the dead had left behind him. If his acts had been just and honorable, his remains were borne with tenderness and honors to consecrated ground; if he had been false and faithless, the body was carried with contempt and ridicule beyond the city's walls, and buried with the opprobrium which would have been in better taste to have come earlier. But if the same practice were in vogue now, the proceedings would in no wise be changed. The verdict of the most exacting tribunal would be "his was a life full of honor and usefulness, deserving of the highest commendation of his fellows;" and loving hands would then, as they will now, bear our friend, amid weeping kindred and mourning friends and public honors, to the most lovely spot in the most honored city of the dead.

Mr. President, the occasion is full of suggestion, but I must not detain you, and will not but for a single further observation. Time sets all things even. In the presence of death we stand upon a common level. As Mr. Webster put it, "one may live as a conqueror, a king or a magistrate, but he must die as a man." In life we are partisans and strugglers; in the presence of death we are but men. Let the fact temper our partisanship and soften our differences, remembering that of the millions who are to fol-

low our friend in the common pathway which all the race are treading, we shall be early among the number. And let us, in the language of our great American poet, who has but just gone before,

"So live, that when the summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan that moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
We go not like the quarry slave at night
Scourged to his dungeon; but sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust approach the grave
Like one that wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

On motion of Commissioner Templeton, Professor John E. Bradley, of the High School, was invited to speak.

He said that he had come to the meeting out of respect to the memory of the deceased, and to listen to the remarks of members of the Board. He had no thought of speaking, and had no words which were worthy to be offered on this occasion without premeditation. And yet, unexpected as was the invitation, he could not but acknowledge its fitness, as well as its courtesy, for Dr. Robertson had stood for nearly three years in a most intimate official relation to the High School, and, as the representative of that institution, he could not refuse to add a hearty word of tribute to the eulogies which had been spoken. While he fully concurred in the discriminating and high encomiums which had been uttered, there was one element of Dr. Robertson's character which had not been dwelt upon by either of the previous speakers, and which was especially note-worthy and admirable. It is a high merit to gain and display wide and varied knowledge, to attain professional skill and eminence; it is a higher merit, and far more admirable, to love and pursue culture for its own sake. To his mind, the most beautiful and commendable trait in the character of many distinguished men has been their devotion to some branch of culture or investigation, from which, in the nature of the case, they could expect no pecuniary return or advantage. It is one

thing to desire knowlede for the uses to which it can be put; it is quite a different, and far nobler, thing to desire it for its one sake. In some men of wealth and eminence, this appreciation of superior attainments is displayed in a liberal patronage of art or learning. In other and rarer instances, it is seen in the amateur pursuit of some branch of culture, in such odd moments as can be spared from the engrossing cares and duties of a busy life. And so I love to think of Rufus Choate, as he gladly turned from the excitement and the strife of the court room to his quiet study, and his favorite classics; and of A. T. Stewart as reading Spinoza in his carriage, and always carrying about with him a pocket edition of some French or German author. It is a note-worthy and admirable feature in these men, and others like them, that they were able to cut loose from the occupations which seemed to absorb them, and seek, with the purest pleasure, the companionship of the kings and queens of thought. I am sure of the accuracy of my statement, when I assert that Dr. Robertson possessed this rare and most desirable quality to a considerable degree. A year or two ago I found myself, very unexpectedly, a fellow passenger with him on a return voyage from Europe. He sought our companionship at once, and was with us a large part of every day of the passage. I was struck with his conversation, which was not only brilliant, but almost constantly related to topics of art and literature. He read to us many passages of rare interest and merit, and evidently enjoyed them most intensely. He told us that it had been one of his greatest pleasures, for many years, to read such extracts to circles of his friends, or larger audiences. Such an appreciation of literature is one of the finest traits of character, and, much as I admired his professional skill and attainments, and the energy and enterprise which led him to pursue his professional studies to so rare a degree of perfection, still more do I admire the pure love of literature and art as manifested in these leisure hours. In the death of Dr. Robertson not only has Albany lost one of her most eminent physicians, but the cause of higher education and independent culture, in this community, has also lost one of its most intelligent and appreciative supporters.

Mr. Lewi then said :

Mr. PRESIDENT — Probably no finer scholar ever sat in this room ; probably no better read man ever participated in the deliberations of this body, than the late Dr. Charles A. Robertson. He combined with his natural ability a thorough academic and professional education, and, whenever the opportunity presented itself, his talents shone resplendent. Raised to high honors and prominent positions as a professional and scientific man long before he was connected with this body, he still took especial pride in being a member of this Board, and also took pride in the performance of the duties devolved upon him. Even in his last illness he manifested his love for the schools by diligently watching the proceedings of the Board, and a devotion to his duties by offering his coöperation to the different committees. By his affability, courtesy and benevolence he made hosts of friends in all ranks of society, who mourn with us the loss of a good and worthy man, and cherish with us his memory.

The report was then adopted by a rising vote of all the members of the Board present.

Mr. Lewi moved that the Board now adjourn to meet on Sunday, April 4th, at 3.30 o'clock P. M., and attend the funeral of Dr. Robertson.

Adopted.

Adjourned.

CHARLES W. COLE,

Secretary.

